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ASSESSING “THE RELIGIOUS” AND “THE SECULAR” IN THE PILGRIMAGE TO GUS DUR’S GRAVE

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Abstract

Abdurrahman Wahid, well-known as Gus Dur, is the fourth president of Indonesia. He was also the leader of Nahdlatul Ulama’ (NU), the largest Muslim organization in the country. Located in the area of Pesantren (Islamic boarding school) Tebuireng, Jombang, East Java, his grave is one the most visited places for pilgrimage, not only in Java, but also in Indonesia. It is reported that in 2017, “more than 3.000 people visit the grave per day, and can increase three times as much during Saturday and Sunday”. Due to the growing number of visitors, the grave has been renovated, and infrastructural facilities have been built, including the establishment of museum, monument, library, and area of parking. It is noteworthy that pilgrimage to particular religious sites has been called as wisata religi (religious tourism). For example, Gus Dur’s grave has been awarded as the best religious tourism in East Java by Anugerah Wisata Jawa Timur (AWJ) in 2017. This is interesting, as it implies that pilgrimage is not always religious, but also may contain secular instances. This article, thus, seeks to investigate how the religious and the secular go hand in hand in the context of pilgrimage by using Gus Dur’s grave as a case of study. I would argue that the problems should be putted in the context of debate over pilgrimage and tourism, considering that the term wisata religi or religious tourism has been

attributed to religious sites and gravesites in particular which have been objectified as a tourist site. Pilgrimage is not merely about religious-based practices, but also about tourist practices. Therefore, this implies that pilgrimage and tourism cannot be viewed in a binary opposition. In the context of global tourism, both are intertwined and overlapped in some ways. In other words, pilgrimage may contain both religious and secular elements.

Keywords: Gus Dur’s Grave, Pilgrimage, Tourism, Religious, Secular

A. Introduction

Abdurrahman Wahid, well-known as Gus Dur, is the fourth president of Indonesia. He was also the leader of Nahdlatul Ulama’ (NU), the largest Muslim organization in the country. Located in the area of Pesantren (Islamic boarding school) Tebuireng, Jombang, East Java, his grave is one the most visited places for pilgrimage, not only in Java, but also in Indonesia. It is reported that in 2017, “more than 3.000 people visit the grave per day, and can increase three times as much during Saturday and Sunday” (“Wisata Religi Makam Gus Dur Jadi Andalan” 2017) . Due to the growing number of visitors, the grave has been renovated, and infrastructural facilities have been built, including the establishment of museum, monument, library, and area of parking.

(Pilgrimage) *Ziarah* to gravesites is an important religious practice in Indonesia, particularly for traditional-Indonesian Muslims. In Java, the tomb of Nine Saints (*wali sanga*) is highly popular as the place for pilgrimage. The Nine Saints are believed to be the holy men with miraculous powers. They were important agencies who contributed to the successful spreading of Islam in the archipelago. Many pilgrims from different parts of Indonesia visit the tombs. Yet, pilgrimage remains disputable in Indonesia, as puritan-conservative Muslims deem pilgrimage to gravesites as heretic (*bidáh*) or even idolatrous (*musyrik*) (George Quinn 2007, 63-79).

It is noteworthy that pilgrimage to particular religious sites has been called as *wisata religi* (religious tourism). For example,

Gus Dur's grave has been awarded as the best religious tourism in East Java by Anugerah Wisata Jawa Timur (AWJ) in 2017 (Syafi'i 2017). This is interesting, as it implies that pilgrimage is not always religious, but also may contain secular instances. This article, thus, seeks to investigate how the religious and the secular go hand in hand in the context of pilgrimage by using Gus Dur's grave as a case of study. I would argue that the problems should be putted in the context of debate over pilgrimage and tourism, considering that the term *wisata religi* or religious tourism has been attributed to religious sites and gravesites in particular which have been objectified as a tourist site. Pilgrimage is not merely about religious-based practices, but also about tourist practices. Therefore, this implies that pilgrimage and tourism cannot be viewed in a binary opposition. In the context of global tourism, both are intertwined and overlapped in some ways. In other words, pilgrimage may contain both religious and secular elements (Margry 2008, 16-17).

B. Pilgrimage and Tourism

The term "pilgrimage" has been highly contested and debated among scholars. As a concept, it has been used to identify, categorize, and explain religiously motivated journeys to a particular site which is believed to be sacred. However, recent studies show that is not always the case. With the flourish of tourism industries, pilgrimage has been subject to commodification, and become an indispensable part of tourist objects. Therefore, it is difficult to make a clear and fixed definition of the term.

According to Peter Jan Margry, pilgrimage is always religious. This can be seen from his definition of pilgrimage. He defines it as a religiously inspired journey to a particular site deemed as sacred, different from the mundane, for the purpose of gaining "spiritual, emotional, or physical healing or benefit", depending on the pilgrim's personal relationship with the sacred. However, Margry concedes that the term "secular pilgrimage" signifies that pilgrimage may also represent secular elements. Accordingly, he suggests that rather than confusing the distinction between "the religious" and "the secular", it is more significant to identify and analyze how "secular pilgrimage" contains religious elements (Margry 2008, 16-17).

Huub de Jonge’s study of Soekarno’s grave (Jonge 2008, 95-120) and Margry’s study of Jim Morrison’s (Margry 2008) grave are likely confirming the above Margry’s concept of pilgrimage. Both Soekarno and Morrison are the secular figure, but their respective graves have now become the site of pilgrimage. Thus both have undergone sacralization. Yet, sacralization is clearer in the case of Morrison than that of Soekarno. Morrison’s grave becomes sacred when his fans produces and shares mythological narratives about him, *i.e.* he is believed to have a supernatural power. As Margry elucidates, the role of media (film, newspaper, and literary works) profoundly contributes to the construction of his sacredness. Besides, both Soekarno’s and Morrison’s graves have been subject to contestation, ritualization, and interpretation.

A number of studies have focused on examining the use of pilgrimage as a concept in a particular case. Noga Collins-Kreiner argues that “the boundaries between pilgrimage and tourism have become blurred”. He shows that the growing studies of pilgrimage have gone into that direction (Collins-Kreiner 2018, 8). In line with this, focusing on the case of the shrine of Khaled Nabi in Northeastern Iran, Mehdi Ebadi divides pilgrimage into four categories: “religious pilgrimage, secular pilgrimage, cultural pilgrimage, and political pilgrimage”, each of which has its respective emphasis and orientation (Ebadi 2015, 71-72).

A number of studies have also focused on motives that drive people in conducting pilgrimage. Scholars contend that it is significant to analyze motives underlying pilgrimage, as in that context partly the boundaries between pilgrimage and tourism remains blurred. Victor Turner’s argument is relevant here that “a tourist is half pilgrim, if a pilgrim is a half tourist” (Margry 2008, 29). Focusing on the context of Greek Orthodox, Matina Terzidou et. al. argue that motivations of religious tourism varies and are highly complex. Yet, according to the authors, the motivations can be divided into two categories: “constructed motivations” and “embodied and affective engagement”. The former refers to how motivations to undertake religious tourism are constructed by “media, identity, place, and performance”. Meanwhile, the latter is likely referring to both personal and social motivations (Terzidou, Scarles, and Saunders 2018, 59). Yet, the authors’ categories of religious tourism motivations signify the intersection between personal and social motivations. Accordingly, this is

consistent with the debate over individuality and *communitas* within pilgrimage (Margry 2008, 20-21).

Meanwhile, in the context of pilgrimage in Indonesia, George Quinn reveals how pilgrimage to local graves in Java has been subject to commercialization. In his view, “money and pilgrimage go together”. He argues that commercial aspects within pilgrimage represent how devotion in a sacred place such as saint tombs reflects “a transactional or contractual relationship with the supernatural, with a saint or with God”. According to Quinn, this does not mean that commercialization undermines devotion. Rather, both are inseparable (George Quinn 2007, 63-79).

C. A Touristic Gravesite

Gus Dur's grave is located at the area of Pesantren Tebuireng, Jombang, East Java. It is also the location of his grandfather's and father's grave. Since his burial on December, 30, 2009, myriad pilgrims have visited the grave. The number of tourist in Jombang have tremendously increased. From 2011-2015, it is reported that the grave is the most-visited place in the religion. In 2017, “more than 3.000 people visit the grave per day, and can increase three times as much during Saturday and Sunday”. Pilgrims come from different parts of Indonesia, not only Java. Arguably, it has become a tourist site. Some travel agents includes it as a list place for *ziarah kubur* (pilgrimage to gravesite), along with that of the nine saints (*wali sanga*) (Mulyani 2017, 79).

Due to the growing number of visitors, the regional government realizes that the grave is potentially religious tourism. As such, in 2010 Gus Dur's grave began to be restored and developed, yet this has not finished at the moment (tempo.co 2010). In so doing, the central, provincial, and regional government are in cooperation, including the allocation of fund. As a result, some infrastructural facilities have been built, such as Islam Nusantara Museum, monument, wide parking area, and area for small businesses.

The grave, therefore, has been subject to commodification. Furthermore, many pilgrims come to there by car and bus. They have to pay for about Rp. 10.000 for parking area. The flourish of small businesses surrounding the grave attracts visitors to go shopping (“Wisata Religi Makam Gus Dur Jadi Andalan” 2017). Likewise, the government continuously develops the grave as

the site for religious tourism, in favour of improving the region’s income. This is somewhat success, as in 2017, Gus Dur’s grave has been awarded as the best religious tourism in East Java by Anugerah Wisata Jawa Timur (AWJ).

Accordingly, I would argue that Gus Dur’s grave is not only for pilgrimage. Rather, it is a visible touristic site. It is a constructed religious tourism. The presence of tourism agents, commodification, and the government attempt for continuous restoration, represent how the grave is appropriated to serve the tourist gaze. As a result, some visitors come to there for the sake of recreation, go shopping, enjoying the grave’s atmosphere, visiting and taking picture at the museum and monument.

Gus Dur’s Grave in the Eyes of Pilgrims: Various Meanings

The increasing number of pilgrims to Gus Dur’s grave leads to question: what motivations do drive them to visit? According to Quinn, for Indonesian-traditional Muslims, pilgrimage to gravesite reflects “the act of piety”, as it is endorsed by the Qur’an and Hadith (George Quinn 2007, 63-79). In the case of Gus Dur’s grave, I would argue that the explanation of piety is insufficient to understand pilgrims’ motivations to visit the grave. This is because the motivation varies, depending on how an individual or group give meanings and understand Gus Dur. Accordingly, I will take this dynamics into account to reflect the concept of pilgrimage.

Gus Dur as the tenth saint (*wali ke sepuluh*)

Gus Dur was the leader of Nahdlatul Ulama’ (NU), the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia. NU is commonly associated as the traditionalist Muslims who adhere and practice the Sunni Islam. In opposition to puritan-conservative Muslims, NU highly values the practice of *ziarah kubur* (pilgrimage to gravesites), particularly to tombs of saints, virtuous *kiai* (Muslim clergy), and ulama, who are believed to have certain spiritual specialities. It was said that Gus Dur’s himself habitually did pilgrimage to the gravesites. Motivations of pilgrims to visit Gus Dur’s grave in part cannot be separated from such an understanding.

In the circle of Nahdlatul ‘Ulama, there has been a narrative that Gus Dur is a saint (*wali*) and even the tenth saint (*wali ke*

sepuluh), the successor of the nine saints. This narrative has been popular even during Gus Dur's lifetime, and confirmed by some other *kiais* (Online 2014). Yet, after his death, it has become increasingly popular. In 2014, in commemoration of his birth day, a book titled "*Gus Dur itu Wali*" was launched. The book contains ninety stories of people who have experienced his sainthood. For instance, it is told that Gus Dur could predict the future (Radio 2014). According to Anwar Masduki, the construction of Gus Dur's sainthood is shaped by two narratives. First, his discrete and rare experiences are believed to be a sign of his sainthood. Second, he is believed to fit the basic criterion of saint that "only a saint knows other saints" (Masduki 2014).

Due to the belief of Gus Dur's sainthood, pilgrims, particularly Indonesian traditional Muslims, are motivated to visit his grave for the purpose of seeking his blessing (*ngalap berkah*). They visit the grave with bringing their respective wishes, such as asking for prosperity and success in exam (Online 2018). They believe that the grave is a good place for praying (*mustajab*) so that their wishes will be acceded by God. Even, some pilgrims believe that the grave's soil and flowers on it can be used as a *jimat* (mystical charm) (Online 2010).

The above pilgrims' motivation reflects that they view Gus Dur's grave as the sacred. This is consistent with their belief of his sainthood. According to Mircea Eliade, "the sacred manifests itself, shows its self, as something holly different from the profane" (Eliade and Eliade 1959, 11). In the case of Gus Dur, his sacredness manifests through the narratives of his sainthood which are popularly widespread among traditional Muslims.

As a matter of fact, Gus Dur's sacredness can be seen in the pilgrims' ritual practices at the grave. They mostly recite the Qur'an, particularly the verse of *yāsin*, and *tahlīl*—a set of readings derived from the Qur'an and Hadith. For the pilgrims, the practice of *tawassul* is indispensable. Popularly common in the NU circle, *tawassul* refers to the "mediation of a prophet or a saint". According to NU tradition, there are three circumstances in which God is believed to be closer to human beings: at holy places, during "auspicious times", and through saints (George Quinn 2007, 63-79). Praying through these three circumstances, therefore, is seen to be an exact time. For the pilgrims, Gus Dur's grave arguably fits to the three circumstances.

Quinn argues that the practice of *ngalap berkah* at the tomb of saints reflects “a transactional practice” between a pilgrim, saint, and God (George Quinn 2007, 63-79). In the case of Gus Dur’s grave, this is true, I would argue, as this can be seen from the above pilgrims’ motivations to visit the grave. For instance, through the practice of *tawassul*, the pilgrims use Gus Dur’s sainthood as mediation to connect themselves to God. In so doing, they expect that God will accede their respective wishes. In this respect, Margry’s idea is relevant that pilgrims attempt to encounter with the sacred “in order to gain support, protection, and eternal salvation” (George Quinn 2007, 63-79).

What do the above pilgrims’ motivations tell us in regard to the concept of pilgrimage? Let me refer to the definition of pilgrimage introduced by Margry. In his view, pilgrimage is always religious. It is a religiously inspired journey to a sacred site for the sake of attaining spiritual, emotional, and physical healing or benefit”. In the case of pilgrimage to Gus Dur’s grave, the pilgrims’ motivations represent Margry’s definition of pilgrimage. First, the pilgrims are religiously inspired by the NU tradition in particular. Second, due to Gus Dur’s sainthood, the grave is seen to be sacred. Third, the pilgrimage is conducted for the sake of seeking his blessing, depending on various wishes. In this regard, it is noteworthy that pilgrimage is not always based on religious motivation. As explained previously, the pilgrims insert their respective mundane intentions to the pilgrimage. This signifies that the secular and the religious are intertwined in the pilgrimage.

Gus Dur as a Humanist

Interestingly, visitors of Gus Dur’s grave is not only Muslims but also non-Muslims. This is because Gus Dur is not a monolithic figure. He was not only a saint, virtuous ulama, and Muslim intellectual, but also more importantly a humanist. Up to the present day, Gus Dur is much respected for his commitment, dedication, and struggle for pluralism, human rights, and democracy. Yet, I prefer to call him a humanist, as it is written on his cemetery: “here rests a humanist”. It is said that Gus Dur himself asked his family to write it on his cemetery. It is written in four languages: Bahasa, English, Arabic, and Chinese.

Most non-Muslims visitors come to Gus Dur’s grave for the

sake of respect, thanksgiving, and remembrance of his struggle, albeit they may pray for him based on their respective faiths. For example, the association of Indonesian Chinese visited Gus Dur's grave for the sake of respect to his struggle and contribution to recognize Confucianism and Chinese culture in Indonesia (Online 2015). Likewise, members of Indonesian Christian Church (GKI) in Jombang visited the grave for the purpose of respect and reflecting Gus Dur's values, such as pluralism, tolerance, peace, and liberation (Kristianto 2015).

Accordingly, the non-Muslim motivations arise the following question: is this a kind of pilgrimage? How do they perceive Gus Dur's grave? Do they believe to the sacredness of the grave? Answering such questions requires a rigorous empirical research. However, I would argue that Margry's definition of pilgrimage seems to be irrelevant in the case of non-Muslims visiting Gus Dur's grave. My argument is that this is not religiously inspired journey, but rather motivated by a sense of respect and remembrance. Besides, the sacredness of Gus Dur's grave remains vague in this regard, compared to those who believe him as a saint. Likewise, their visit reflects secular motives which more emphasize on the figure of Gus Dur as a humanist.

Political Legitimacy

Another important thing is that politicians also do pilgrimage to Gus Dur's grave, particularly candidates of president, governor, and regent. At the moment of general election in 2014, Joko Widodo, the present Indonesian president, did pilgrimage to Gus Dur's grave, as a part of his campaign throughout East Java. In the present political context, with the coming of 2019 general election, Puti Guntur Sukarno Putri, a candidate of governor vice of East Java, and Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono, a high representative of Demokrat Party in East Java, had done pilgrimage to Gus Dur's grave. Like a pilgrim in general, they recite the holy Qur'an and do prayer at the grave.

It seems common that Gus Dur's grave attracts many politicians to visit at the time of political events. In their view, the figure of Gus Dur is highly significant, as he is regarded as "the teacher of nation (*guru bangsa*)". In his study of pilgrimage to gravesite undertaken by Indonesian presidents, Quinn shows how

their pilgrimage reflects what he calls “political legitimacy” (Sakai, Banks, and Walker 2009, 173-99). In the case of Gus Dur’s grave, this reflects a symbolic meaning that by doing pilgrimage to the grave, politicians use the figure of Gus Dur as “a political legitimacy” in favour of their political interests. Similar to the non-Muslims’ pilgrimage, politicians emphasize on the figure of Gus Dur’s as a humanist. As such, it is likely that they seek to announce to the public that they endorse Gus Dur’s values. In short, it is difficult to release political motives behind their pilgrimage.

If that is the case, it is obvious that the pilgrimage undertaken by politicians is not consistent with Margry’s definition of pilgrimage. The secular motives manifest in their political intentions. Therefore, this kind of pilgrimage should be understood in a particular political context. In this respect, Mehdi Ebadi uses the term “political pilgrimage” to understand a kind of pilgrimage which is driven by political motivations (Ebadi 2015, 72).

C. Conclusion

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that in the case of pilgrimage to Gus Dur’s grave, the intersection between the religious and the secular can be seen in the following ways. First, the construction of Gus Dur’s grave as *wisata religi* (religious tourism) leads to commodification and the making of a visible touristic gravesite. Hence, the grave is not only it is, but also a place for recreation. The establishment of museum and monument and the flourish of small business market arguably confirm this. Second, pilgrims has different meanings of the significance of Gus Dur’s grave. This leads to different motivations that drive them to visit the grave. Accordingly, the intersection between the secular and the religious manifest in different motivations of pilgrimage to the grave. More clearly, although rituals performed in the grave is religious, yet the motivation to visit the grave is secular. The case of pilgrimage to Gus Dur’s grave confirm the previous studies on this topic. That is, with the rise of global tourism, pilgrimage is not always religious, but rather an integral part of tourism.

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